

THE KIAI

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MEETING WITH A REMARKABLE MAN

Most people enter our consciousness gradually. We have no recollection of the first time we met even though we might share a long history. But occasionally we notice something remarkable during a first meeting, and then we always remember how we met that person.

In 1979 I was the senior student at the Aikido Institute. I had been training nearly five years, intensively for four, and I was preparing for my nidan exam. In those days we trained very hard – like all old-timers it always seems things are easier and softer now – but it was hard training. Lots of high falls, lots of strong, fast techniques.



As part of my role as senior student, I felt it was my job to test any advanced students who came into the dojo. The primary method was a kind of endurance contest. I would begin training lightly with my partner and gradually increase the pace and the strength of the techniques. My partner would respond in kind. I'd throw in some variation that made the ukemi more difficult, and I'd see if my partner could/would do the same. We would continue that way until one of us gave up by lowering the pace and power. At that time I was in my twenties so I had lots of endurance and my ukemi was quite good.

One night a new black belt showed up for class. He was also in his twenties, and as I watched him during warm-ups I could see he was pretty good. Oh, boy! Here's some fun!

The sensei demonstrated irimi nage, I believe shomen uchi. Irimi nage was one of my favorite techniques, and I knew a number of variations. I quickly bowed in with the new black belt, and we began training. The techniques were firm yet gentle, but the pace soon increased. I threw my partner harder, and he took a beautiful ukemi. He threw me harder, and I did my best. The throws became harder and faster. I threw harder; he threw harder. I began to throw in variations to see if my partner could keep up with me. I

threw in a variation, and he threw in the same variation. Neither of us was giving an inch. I decided to try one of the more severe variations – your partner starts his high fall and when he is in mid-air, you throw him straight down. I knew I could take the ukemi – could my partner? I threw him straight down. He deftly took the fall. I threw him again and watched his graceful response. I had to admire falls like that. Now it was his turn to throw and my turn to show what I could do. But then the remarkable thing happened. This partner did not give up nor did he respond in kind. Instead he stood up and said to me “I think you are throwing me straight down.” Then he threw me, but not straight down. I was amazed. The contest was over, and he had won. He had been up to the challenge, recognized it, and had responded in a most Aiki way. Hoa and I have been friends ever since.

KIM PEUSER



INTIMIDATION AND ME

Intimidation... The first thing that came to my mind the first time I trained at Aikido Institute. It was a Friday night keiko. Steve Sempai was teaching some jo dori. I was visiting Oakland from Reno. I had just taken a long break from training in Reno, from Aikido, and was just barely getting started again. I was not comfortable with weapons in general and here I was attempting to throw Gerard! I felt utterly puny, to say the least.

This feeling for me is unavoidable considering such recognized Aikidokas cultivated their early years on the very same mat. Auspiciously all the classes I attended were continuously energetic and insightful. Each and every time, I went back to Reno with an improved technique. However, being a novice aikidoka, I was always intimidated right before class started, every time I visited.

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Looking back, I always had that intimidation feeling. The first time I ever trained in Reno, not knowing any aikido, I felt intimidated right before every class for at least the first month of training. I was so intimidated that mustering out a kiai was almost impossible. Aviv Sensei would often remind me that kiai's were free and I should have no problem giving them. After changing instructors, when Vince Sensei came into town, I again was intimidated. I remember being intimidated by his very stern Japanese ways as he corrected how I thrust the jo at him for a tsuki. I later became uchi deshi under the same very instructor.

As uchi deshi, I gained a feeling of comfort being on the mat. Yet whenever I trained at Aikido Institute during that time, the same feeling of intimidation would come back. It certainly came back during New Year's day training, when Sensei asked us to execute the 20 jo suburi left handed. I attributed this of course, to training in "unfamiliar zone" since this was something we never did in Reno.

When I moved from Reno to Oakland and officially became a member of the dojo, I must admit that my unease of training in this "unfamiliar zone" lingered for the first month or so. The unease certainly did not come from my training partners or the instructors, who welcomed me sincerely. The unease came from within, feeling the same intimidation I felt when I stepped on the mat for the very first time ever. I struggled with this feeling for a time but later on realized that it is all about the shugyo*, as my former Sensei would say.

Albeit its potential negativity, intimidation has proven to be a valuable tool. On and off the mat, I just attempt to face it head on and blend. I am certainly enjoying my training here at the Aikido Institute and am learning an enormous amount. Thank you. So what else is left to say but... one-gaishimas.....

**Shugyo means "determined training that fosters enlightenment". Its purpose is to "tighten the slack", toughen the body, and polish the spirit.*

JENNIFER VELASCO



NIDAN ESSAY: COMING HOME

In July, I returned to the Bay Area after living away for three years. While my decision to return home was personal in nature, it was not just a move back to the Bay Area, but a coming home to myself as an individual and as an Aikidoist. Taking my surprise nidan test in October signified the growth I have undergone in the last few years, and was a fitting conclusion to my journey.

For two years, I lived in San Diego, and trained with Bernice Tom Sensei at Sunset Cliffs Aikido. When I first moved to San Diego, I thought that training at Sunset Cliffs would be the simplest part of my transition. I soon discovered, however, that letting go of Oakland and the training that I grew up with was very difficult. While Sunset Cliffs is Iwama style, Bernice Sensei approaches Aikido differently than we do in Oakland. During my initial months there, I could not let go of the cardinal rules that I was taught in Oakland, rules that did not always apply at Sunset Cliffs.

In San Diego, for example, uke attacks nage straight on, and only during morote dori kokyuu ho do students attack off the line. In contrast, Aikido Institute students attack off the line for grabs, and I continued to attack this way in San Diego. Believe it or not, for almost a whole year at Sunset Cliffs, I was convinced that all of THEM were attacking wrong, and that only I had it right! When I finally brought this up to Bernice Sensei, she explained that she believes that attacking on the line is a more authentic attack, as rarely an attacker will take the care to get off of the line in a real-life situation; this made sense to me. The light bulb finally came on! By allowing the possibility that there can exist multiple interpretations of the techniques, I was able to learn from Bernice Sensei, without feeling like I was betraying Oakland. My training in San Diego taught me that an open mind and heart produces much more growth than holding onto the past and the "right" ways of doing things.

After two years in San Diego, I moved to Massachusetts, where my training challenges increased. We moved to a very small town on the coast, and the nearest Iwama-ish dojo was over an hour's drive away. My training partner (Benson) and I would drive to this dojo one or two nights a week, and trained in a tiny space where we were sempai to all but two members of the dojo. Added to this, the teacher taught a combination of Aikikai-style and Iwama-style techniques, and he challenged us to loosen up and to MOVE! Training

THERE IS NO GREATER
ILLUSION THAN FEAR,
NO GREATER WRONG THAN PREPARING TO DEFEND
YOURSELF,
NO GREATER MISFORTUNE THAN HAVING AN ENEMY.
WHOEVER CAN SEE THROUGH ALL FEAR
WILL ALWAYS BE SAFE.

TAO TE CHING

at the dojo was an all night affair lasting at least four hours, driving included. I soon came to appreciate the proximity to bustling dojos and experienced teachers that I had enjoyed.

When we were not dedicating the whole evening to training, we trained at home on a small mat in the living room, or outside when the weather permitted. While it was limiting to train in a cramped space where you have to fall carefully to avoid the floor lamp or crashing into the armchair, it opened up a new realm of experiences. When you do not have a dojo, a Sensei, or multiple training partners to lean on, Aikido becomes a very personal experience. We had to motivate ourselves to train, and had to rely on the past instruction from our senseis to guide our practice. We carefully broke down techniques and had the luxury to dedicate a whole hour to shomen uchi ikkyo if we wanted to. Training with Benson made my Aikido stronger because it allowed me to evaluate what parts of my training were most important to me.

When I came back to the Bay Area, I was a changed person in many ways. As an Aikidoist, I had three years of intensive training that not only enhanced my technique, but also informed my approach to training. I am a much more open-minded Aikidoist now, and am not afraid to look at techniques from different points of view (blending). I found that the solid foundation created in Oakland sustained me in the years that I was gone, and that it was there to support me in my difficult move back home. The people that were on the mat when I left enthusiastically made space for me when I returned, and proved to me that Aikido is so much more than a physical practice, it is a life-long journey.

MEGAN SWEET



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DORAN SENSEI'S BIRTHDAY

When I first started aikido I would search for hours on the internet about Aikido. I would find a name, do searches on one person till I found someone else I thought was interesting and do searches on them. Of course one person whom I read about was Koichi Tohei Sensei. In my searches of Tohei Sensei I ran across a story written by a Doran Sensei. Although at the time I had no idea that I would train in his dojo one day. It was the story of how Doran Sensei began his Aikido training in the marines, and later rafter receiving his shodan, went to Japan and studied with Tohei sensei.

This was amazing to me. Doran Sensei went to study in Japan with Tohei Sensei, whose name I ran across over and over again on the internet. What was even more amazing was Doran Sensei taught in Redwood city. That wasn't far at all. I had no idea at the time that people in the Aikido world knew each other. So I had no idea that Kim Sensei knew Doran Sensei.

Now I don't know why but because of my love of Chinese kung fu movies in my childhood, I thought great masters were all in Asia, hidden away where I would never find them. If I did find them, of course they would never teach me their art, I'm a foreigner.

Of course I was new to the dojo. I didn't realize how special my dojo was. I didn't know enough to realize all the instructors who gave me teachings everyday were great martial artists. That the people at the Aikido Institute are well known, and well respected and know other well-known and respected Aikidoists. I expected someone like Frank Doran Sensei to be totally inaccessible. But that is not true! People can walk into Doran Sensei's dojo and just sign up to train. Other aikidoists can visit his dojo, pay a mat fee and train. I think this is a special gift in the bay area, one that not everyone knows about. You can walk into many dojos, sign up and train with instructors who have been training in the States and Japan, for over 20, 30 or even 40 years. Doran Sensei was definitely a sensei I never expected to ever be on the mat with.

There were a lot of yudansha on the mat the day of Doran Sensei's birthday, a sea of them, and some of them bowed into me. They had varying styles and some obviously studied other martial arts/styles than Aikido. To me this just showed me how regarded Doran Sensei is; that so many martial artists had come to honor his 70th birthday and over 40 years in Aikido.

Class was fun for me, but eventually after being thrown around a lot, class ended and dan scrolls were given to a few people. Among them Peter Arno Sensei (dojo-cho of Fair Oaks Aikido) received his Sandan. I had met and trained with Peter Arno Sensei the week before at Hoa Sensei's dojo opening. Also Trung Dinh received his Nidan. I had been

introduced to him the week before at Hoa Sensei's dojo opening as Trung, a former uchi deshi of the Oakland dojo. After that we bowed out and the eating commenced. Soon after that Kim Sensei said goodbye to Doran Sensei and as a dojo we took our leave.

I think the most memorable moment for me about the event was, when we arrived at the dojo and we walked into the dojo. Almost immediately Doran Sensei came out to greet Kim Sensei and thank him for coming, Kim Sensei asked for the card for Doran Sensei, and I handed it to him. As Kim Sensei handed Doran Sensei his card, something happened that I noticed immediately. Doran Sensei accepted the card with two hands, just as I had been taught to. He accepted the card gratefully and was touched to receive it.

I've asked a number of times what the title of Shihan means. Master Teacher, and I've also heard it is an honorary title like esquire. I've also been told that a Shihan is an example of an Aikidoka who has devoted their life to Aikido and is an example to other Aikidoka. My understanding of aikido is young, and everyday I "hope" it changes and grows. I have a lot more to learn about technique, aikido, being uchi deshi and about being a human being. But I thought Doran Sensei very much an example to me in that moment, by the affection, respect and humbleness he showed as he received from Kim Sensei a birthday card for his 70th birthday.

JONATHAN NAPIER-MORALES



Eye Key Doe? (OR MEMOIRS OF A 5TH KYUU)

There I was minding my own business when the front door flew open and my partner Roger announced. "I just got your Christmas present. It's a three-month membership to that Aikido place on Telegraph."

"YOU WHAT?"

Visions of passing the big glass window on the bus everyday while commuting from work went through my head. All those people dressed in white, moving towards the back, then to the front, then to the back again in perfect unison. Choreography that Busby Berkeley would have envied.

"Yeah, the guy who sold it to me looked like Keanu Reeves, only bigger and butcher."

Little did I know what was in store. The Ushi Deshi said, "Just do what everyone else is doing." That worked for the warm up stretches, but for Tai no Henko, I was lost. Everyone picked a partner and there I stood alone. Suddenly a guy 20 feet tall, with the sternest face I had ever seen, offered me his hand. I'm still not sure if it was my backing up, or the look of sheer terror on my face that was the give-away. I had never done this before. The Ushi Deshi took over.

Everything was going fairly well till Darth Vader pointed at me, said "Mas", and offered me his hand. There I was, face to face with death. "No Mas, No Mas," I said to myself. The old twilight zone episode where Robert Redford plays death came to mind. So I decided just to take death's hand.

It has been one year since that first day in the Aikido Institute. In that time, I have encountered the most fascinating teachers and students.

Kim Sensei rules. I have come to the conclusion that he is not of this plane. He lives in the 4th or 5th dimension. He just fades in and out from plane to plane, visiting the earth every Monday, Wednesday and Friday. Then there is Peter Sempai, a brilliant technician, every move a work of art, ending with hands "like falling snow." He insists that the mat is your friend, but the jury is still out on that.

Deborah Sempai commands such respect when she enters the dojo that I believe she is a demigoddess, or has something on everyone and will expose you if you get out of line.

One of my favorites is Alberta Sempai. A true teacher, terribly proper, terribly British. I imagine her wearing a tweed gi. The Hogwarts School of Aikido would kill to have her on staff.

The teenagers at the school were incredibly helpful during this time. They offered invaluable advise such as "Don't go to Monday Night Class. It's really hard." Or, "Don't forget to bow before going out to clean the windows, and if you don't feel like bowing, don't let JR see you."

I remember the Ushi Deshi telling me after about 3 months, "I think you're eligible to take your 6th Kyuu test".
"WHAT! I HAVE TO TAKE A TEST???"

Believe it or not, 6th Kyuu is a very big deal. My whole office knew about it. After my test I was escorted through a small door, into a very small room, through a smaller door, into a tiny room, through another tiny door, into an itsy bitsy room, where it seemed I was to meet members of a strange cult that probably worshipped the Mad Hatter. But instead the Aikido instructors were there and congratulated me on my exam. And at that moment, everything changed. I can do this. I will be an aikidoist.

I've passed my 5th Kyuu test since then. Its difficult not to notice that most students are half my age and much taller, but nobody seems to care. It's still all Aikido. The experience has opened a new world to me. It combines balance, blending, relaxation, energy and respect. But, the magic is in the practice, the actual doing. You borrow someone's body, they borrow yours, you practice, and it creates magic. And, the magic is making me a better athlete, musician and human being.

All this in a year. I wonder what will happen next year.

EDUARDO (EDDIE)



NEW LIGHTING IN DOJO

You may have noticed new lighting at the dojo. Aikido Institute qualified for a complete lighting retrofit under an energy conservation plan called Smart Lights sponsored by the Cities of Oakland and Berkeley. The Smart Lights program conducted an energy audit of Aikido Institute (just the electrical energy we "consume", not the energy we "generate" by training!). They specified the latest, high-output, energy efficient lighting fixtures, supplied a contractor and had all the work done. The old fluorescent fixtures were retrofitted with new ballasts and tubes, and all the incandescent lights were retrofitted with high efficiency bulbs. Results: Aikido Institute will consume an estimated 30% less electricity, and reduce emissions of CO2 into the atmosphere by around 575 lb/year. And we will enjoy better lighting - maybe you will notice less flickering and brighter, more consistent light on the mat and in the dressing rooms and offices. Thanks to the Oakland/Berkeley Smart Lights program and to the contractors who performed the work, American Wholesale lighting, who took great care while working in our dojo environment.

PETER SLOTE

SILENT AUCTION

The Saito Sensei Memorial Scholarship Fund is well on its way! Thanks to those who bought raffle tickets for the Winter Event, we'll be able to provide at least one scholarship for a child in our kids' program.

The raffle was only the first step in our plan to generate funds for scholarships. The next step is a silent auction, which we're planning for the spring of 2003.

In a silent auction, students and teachers donate objects or services to the dojo that others can bid on. The highest bidder wins the object or service and all the money goes to the scholarship fund.

In the past we've had items such as the following offered up for bid:

- A one-hour class with Kim Sensei
- Photography by Michal
- Homemade Brownies

Now's the time to start thinking of what you'd like to offer up for bid to help support the dojo.

Thanks again to all of you for your support of the Winter Event Raffle.

THE SCHOLARSHIP COMMITTEE